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National Science Foundation Extends Funding for New Research Experience

Summary: “Indigenous American to Indigenous Borneo—Adventures in Biology and Biodiversity” is led by Assistant Professor Michael Ceballos.

(August 7, 2014)-The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded Michael Ceballos, assistant professor of biology, a student training grant for a new University of Minnesota, Morris Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program. The program is titled “Indigenous American to Indigenous Borneo—Adventures in Biology and Biodiversity.” Its goal is to provide cohorts of students at all levels with interdisciplinary international research experience.

The program funded six students to conduct research on the island of Borneo in Sarawak, Malaysia. The focuses of their projects ranged from studies of bioactive compounds in native plants to microbiology of exotic bacteria and fungi. The experience also included a robust cross-cultural component in which students interacted with individuals from indigenous communities, including the Bidayuh, Iban, Organgulu, and Penan tribes.

This REU is intended to provide hands-on research opportunities to students from groups that historically have been underrepresented in the sciences, with a focus on Native American students as well as those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Ceballos, recruitment and retention in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields is a concern in academia, especially among this target audience.

“Over the past 10 years we’ve really seen the federal funding agencies make genuine efforts to increase the participation of minority students in the sciences,” says Ceballos. “One thing that these students often lack is international collaborative research experiences. This program provides that and, hopefully, will make them more competitive for graduate and professional programs. This in turn will help to increase the number of minority students pursuing advanced degrees in science and someday, hopefully, increase the number of people of color in the professoriate, which is a national concern.”

“Participating in a research trip abroad was an opportunity I never thought I would experience,” says Keyah Stone ’17, Brookings, South Dakota. “As a Native American, it was particularly amazing to meet and interact with other indigenous tribes from another part of the world. I also got hands-on lab experience that broadened my view of what it really means to become a budding scientist.”

“Indigenous American to Indigenous Borneo—Adventures in Biology and Biodiversity” began early in summer 2014. It will continue through the summer of 2016.

The National Science Foundation Research Experiences for Undergraduates program supports active research participation by undergraduate students in any of the areas of research funded by the National Science Foundation. Additional information is available online at nsf.gov.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow

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